



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte  
Health Service Executive

Social Care Department  
Office of Older People Services  
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19<sup>th</sup> October 2020

Mr. Mattie McGrath T.D.  
Dail Eireann  
Leinster House  
Dublin 2

**PQ 28728/20**

**To ask the Minister for Health if both Gorey and Thomastown District Hospitals had been designated as Covid-19 step down facilities; if the stepdown designation of both Gorey and Thomastown District Hospitals has been removed, when this occurred; if the two hospitals have reverted to their pre-Covid-19 operation status and use; the reason St. Brigid's Hospital has not reverted to its pre-Covid-19 status in the same manner as the similar facilities outlined; when St. Brigid's will have its Covid-19 designation removed and begin resumption of normal operation at the hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter.**

Dear Deputy McGrath,

The Health Service Executive (HSE) has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Question, which were submitted to the Minister for Health for response.

*I have reviewed that matter and the following reply is the current position.*

In the current Covid-19 pandemic public health emergency, Gorey District Hospital was designated as a Covid-19 step down facility to support flow from Wexford General Hospital and other acute hospitals in the region. Whilst Gorey District Hospital has resumed some usual service provision, I can advise that it remains a designated unit for Covid-19 and these arrangements are closely monitored on an ongoing basis given the current upsurge in reported cases of Covid-19 in the Wexford area.

St. Columba's Hospital Thomastown is a long stay residential care and rehabilitation facility in the Kilkenny area - it has not been designated as a Covid-19 step-down facility.

In the current Covid-19 pandemic public health emergency, St. Brigid's was also designated as a Covid-19 step down facility to support flow from the acute hospitals in the region, based on the Covid-19 modelling predications that South East Community Healthcare (SECH) was working to at the time.

As the demand for Covid-19 step down beds was not required to the level as predicted during the initial Covid-19 pandemic, SECH utilised the staffing resource from St. Brigid's to meet competing demands and priorities in the South Tipperary area. These arrangements have been kept under review - there remains a critical requirement for staff elsewhere in community healthcare services at this time. South East Community Healthcare appreciates the commitment of the excellent team of staff associated with St. Brigid's in taking up redeployment in Covid-19 related roles in community healthcare services.

Interim arrangements are currently in place for patients requiring residential convalescent, emergency respite and palliative care to be accommodated elsewhere in the HSE's community healthcare services in the South Tipperary area.

Management in SECH are both implementing and continuously reviewing the SECH Recovery Plan for the reopening and resumption of services which were temporarily suspended or reduced as a result of Covid-19. Our phased recovery planning is in line with the national HSE Guiding principles for reintroducing services in a COVID environment.

As services resume, prevailing public health guidance and social distancing requirements will have an impact on service capacity across the system and particularly in our residential and short stay inpatient units. There is an absolute requirement to ensure that strict infection prevention and control measures are implemented across services and that services are delivered in appropriate physical environments that enable adequate social distancing measures at all times, in line with Public Health recommendations.

I wish to advise you that SECH is therefore assessing and reviewing all services and the physical environments that those services are operating in, to determine what actions are required, if any, to enable the safe resumption of services, in line with current guidance.

In addition to service resumption, SECH are required to maintain covid related services and ensure that there are appropriate measures in place to respond to an increased demand for covid related services and activity. The current upsurge in reported cases of Covid-19 requires the HSE and SECH to be fully prepared for increased activity and demand. With regret, SECH is not in a position to provide a date as to when services will resume at St. Bridget's as service resumption is dependent on the management of Covid related activity within the region along with the need to be assured that services at St. Brigid's can safely resume in a manner which is compliant with prevailing public health guidance and Infection, Prevention and Control guidance.

I wish to re-assure you however that patients who require convalescent, respite and/or palliative care services will be supported in alternative settings at this time.

I trust this clarifies.

Yours sincerely,



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**Barbara Murphy**  
**Head of Services for Older People**  
**South East Community Healthcare**